

## **Forgotten Friend** by **darthstormer**

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Family, Hurt-Comfort

**Language:** English

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-01-08 22:42:31

**Updated:** 2018-01-08 22:42:31

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 03:34:37

**Rating:** K +

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,964

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Jane opens up about a dark moment in her past she would rather forget. Together, she and Hopper remember a forgotten friend.

## Forgotten Friend

"What is cemetery?"

Chief Jim Hopper looked over at the small girl riding next to him in the Blazer. He had gotten used to Jane's habit of asking questions that seemed to come completely out of the blue. If anything, it reminded him even further of his daughter Sara, who used to question him in similar fashion. In the past few months, since the closure of the lab and a reduction in the danger of discovery, he had fallen into the habit of taking Jane for drives around the less populated parts of town to get a change of scenery from the tiny cabin in the woods. On these drives, the questions would often pour forth as she continued to take in new sights for the first time.

Looking past her and following her gaze out the window, he realized they were currently driving past the Hawkins town cemetery.

"Well," he began, "when people die, a cemetery is the place where their body is buried."

It felt a little strange to discuss death so bluntly with a young child, but he knew she had dealt with far worse, so he continued, "It gives their family and friends a place to visit and remember them. Sometimes they bring something to make the grave look nice."

"Flowers?" she asked, looking at the fresh bouquets adorning a handful of the headstones near the road.

"Yeah, sometimes. Other times, they come just to talk. No one really knows for sure what happens to us when we die, and people find it comforting to think their loved ones might be able to hear the things they have to say."

He looked back over and saw a look of deep concentration on her face and she mulled over deeper thoughts in her head. He knew better than to dig into her question right then; she would come back to him when she was ready. She wound up sitting in that same deep thought the rest of the drive home and the whole walk back to the cabin. Hopper followed a step behind as she unbolted the door,

walked inside and settled onto the couch, still thinking hard. He began to worry just what might be rattling around in there; it was easy enough to answer most questions that arose about how life and the world around her worked. It concerned him, however, just how long her attention was holding on death and what comes after.

After hanging his own coat on its hook by the door, Hopper walked over to the fridge and retrieved a beer, cracking it open as he walked over to join her on the couch.

Finally, she broke the silence. "Is that where Benny is?" she asked.

He was taken aback at the unexpected question. He had completely forgotten their paths had crossed, however briefly, when she escaped from the lab and tried to steal some food from his kitchen, before being run off. He was ashamed to admit, in all that had happened in the years since, that he hadn't thought much about his old friend.

"Uh, yeah," he finally answered. "He didn't have any relatives around here, but his friends picked out a nice spot for him over there."

A sudden realization washed over him like a bucket of cold water as he locked eyes with her and saw the pain tugging at the corners of her mouth; in all their time together, they had never talked about Benny. How did she know he was dead?

"Oh, Jesus," he whispered. She had still been there. "Were you still there, at the restaurant, when he..." Hopper trailed off, unsure of any delicate way to ask this.

"Yes," she answered, a single tear falling loose and rolling silently down her cheek.

"When he shot himself?" he finished.

This time, she shook her head as more tears fell. "No, Bad Men."

She had tried so hard to forget that night. The nice man who tried to help the lost and frightened girl who wandered into his kitchen. The nice man who cooked her the burger. Who closed the restaurant early so people wouldn't spot her. Who gave her a shirt so she could get out of the gown from the lab. Who was shot right in front of her

when the bad men came to take her back. As it all came flooding back, the tears fell freely as she sobbed into her hands.

Hopper sat there stunned as he watched his little girl break down before him. He pulled her into a tight embrace and held her as the sobs wracked through her. His own mind was suddenly awash in guilt and anger. He had been so focused on finding Will, he had left it to his officers to investigate the scene at Benny's. He had accepted it when the death had been ruled it a suicide but looking back he wasn't even sure if that had been Gary, the local coroner who made that ruling, or the guy sent in from state; the same one that tried to pass off a dummy for Will's body. He had known that Jane passed through Benny's earlier in the day but the witnesses had all thought Benny ran her off. It had never occurred to him that Benny had hidden her away until they all left and then tried to help her, but that was the kind of gentle giant he was.

As her tears began to subside and her breathing returned to normal, Hopper loosened his embrace around her but kept a reassuring hand on her shoulder as he caught her gaze again.

"I know I told I would never push you for explanations about everything that happened in the lab, and after you got out," he began. "I told you that when and if you were ready to talk about anything, I am here." He paused again, wording his request carefully. "I know this is a lot to ask, and if you're not ready, I understand. But can you tell me what happened that day, with Benny? As far as any of us ever knew, he killed himself, though none of us could ever figure out why."

After a moment of hesitation, she nodded her head. "Yes," she whispered.

Not really knowing where to start, she decided to begin at the lab, the night she escaped.

"When the alarms would go off in the lab, one of Papa's helpers would always come and check on me. That night, no one came. It was loud and I got scared. I walked into the hall, people were running everywhere, but no one noticed me. The alarms were louder outside my room, and I just started running."

In an uncharacteristic moment of unguardedness, the words poured forth; more than she had ever spoken in their year and a half together. Hopper sat there, taking it all in and doing his best to suppress his ever-growing fury at the lab and everyone associated with it, Jane excluded of course.

She went on to explain how, after sneaking out the front doors and into the outside world for the first time in her life, she had found her way across the grounds and under the fence through a culvert pipe. Once she was finally far from the fence and over a ridge, the alarms were finally too distant to hear. Only then did the panic start to set in at what she had done.

"I wasn't supposed to leave my room without Papa or one of his helpers. Ever. I knew he would be so very angry with me if they found me."

She passed the night, cold and alone, trembling with fear, tucked into the hollow of a tree trunk. Only once dawn broke and the sun rose over the hills did she allow herself to close her eyes and try to sleep.

"It was the first time I saw the sun. It felt warm and safe."

Hearing that, Hopper couldn't decide if he felt like crying or punching someone. He couldn't even begin to fathom living the first twelve years of life and never seeing sunlight.

"When I woke up, I could smell food cooking. I was so hungry. The alarms had gone off before they brought me dinner so I hadn't eaten for a day. I followed the smell and found Benny."

Here, the story caught up with the partial details Hopper knew. She described watching from the edge of the woods and building up the courage to sneak in the back door. How she waited for Benny to bring food out to the tables and snuck in and helped herself to a basket of fries.

"He saw me and got mad. He chased me toward the back door as I tried to get away but he caught me. He thought I was a boy."

At that, the slightest hint of a smile twitched at the corner of her lips.

"Once he realized I was a girl, and saw the gown from the lab, he knew right away I was in trouble."

After checking to make sure no one in the dining room had followed or seen, he had her wait in a chair he kept by the back door. He brought her a few slices of bread and a glass of water, and told her that once the lunch diners were gone, he would fix her some real food. She had sat there in the dim hallway, overhearing bits of conversation and unsure whether she should make a run for it once more into the woods. Eventually he returned and told her it was safe to come out.

"He told me he closed early. No one else would come. He made me a hamburger. He was nice."

At that, her tears began to silently fall once more. Hopper reached out and wrapped both of her tiny hands in one of his, reassuringly.

"He tried to ask my name, where I came from. I knew it wasn't safe to tell him."

She continued by describing how she overheard his phone call to someone while she ate. At first she was worried he was calling Papa to take her back, but something about the concern in his voice reassured her that he was trying to get help for her. She could tell he was too nice to give her back to Papa. Later, while doing dishes, he gave her ice cream, as much as she wanted.

"Papa gave me ice cream once, but only because I found the person he wanted me to listen to, in the bath. Benny was nice; I didn't have to do anything to get a treat. Then, Papa and the bad men came. Benny thought it was a customer and he said he would make them go away. They tricked him and said they were the people he called to help me. Then..."

She paused again and tried to gather the courage to say what had happened. She had seen it all, nothing could change that. Still, it felt like saying the words out loud would somehow make it more real.

"When he wasn't looking, the bad lady shot him. I saw her raise the gun and I was so scared I couldn't warn him." She started to sob once

more as Hopper pulled her into another protective hug. "I didn't say anything and she shot him and he died. He tried to help me and he died." She began to shudder once more as the tears fell.

"It wasn't your fault," Hopper said, stroking her hair and trying to reassure her. "Nothing that happened was your fault. They were evil people who did terrible things to you and anyone else they felt was in their way."

"I ran," she continued, as she began to catch her breath again, though she remained nestled close in Hoppers protective embrace. "There were two more of Papa's men at the back door and...I killed them. I'm sorry. I didn't want to, but I had to get away. They were going to take me back home."

The word caught in her throat as she said it. That wasn't the right word, not anymore. "Not home. Back to the lab. I ran back into the woods. As far as I could go. After a long time, I heard the people calling for Will, so I tried to stay away. I didn't want anyone else to get hurt."

As she described her route as best she could remember, Hopper marveled at just how close the two of them had come to crossing paths that night. What course would life have taken if he had found her then, wandering lost and alone in the woods?

"I didn't know where to go. It was getting cold and the rain started to fall. I was scared of the lightning and I hid under another tree. I was so tired and I didn't want anyone else to get hurt because of me. I knew Papa was going to be so very angry. He would put me in the dark room for a long time; probably longer than ever before. I had no where to go and I was so cold. I knew I had to go back to Papa."

She leaned back once more and again, the slightest hint of a smile came to her face. Hopper had a good idea what was coming next, but wasn't about to interrupt. He knew how therapeutic it could be to open up like this, and wasn't about to get in the way of whatever healing benefit this unburdening might be having.

"I had just started to walk back through the rain to where I thought the lab was, when I heard voices again. I was going to run away,

when they spotted me and I froze. It was Mike. And Dustin and Lucas," she added, almost as an afterthought.

She sat back, a look of resolution on her face, and Hopper knew they had reached the end of this particular tale. He let out the breath he hadn't realized he was even holding. It was unbelievable to him that she had come some close to giving up and walking right back into Brenner's clutches, though he had to admit, he would have probably done exactly the same thing in her unimaginable circumstances. As much as the fatherly side of him wanted to hate Mike Wheeler, as the boy who insisted on dating his little girl, he was once again forced to be eternally grateful to the young man who had time and again saved his Jane. The young man who had defied Hopper's own direct orders to stay out of the woods and gone looking for his friend. Who had found a young girl, cold and scared and took her home, got her someplace warm and dry. Who sensed she was in trouble and kept her hidden even from his own parents until they could sort things out.

He hated to think what would have happened if Mike had walked her in the front door that night and presented her to his parents. Ted Wheeler would have called the police immediately, Brenner's people would have intercepted the call and Jane would have been locked away in her prison cell bedroom by midnight. Yes, Mike Wheeler had proven time and again to be her very own knight in shining armor.

"I'm so sorry," he said at last. "So sorry you had to see that happen."

Saying nothing, she gave a small nod.

"Can we bring Benny flowers?" she asked after another long silence.

"Of course. Next Saturday, when we go out."

This returned a smile once more to her face and Hopper marveled at her tender heart, uncorrupted by the horrors that would have broken most people.

The next Saturday afternoon found them driving once more by the Hawkins cemetery. As they drove, Jane held tight to the small box in her lap, careful not to jostle the precious contents within. After



checking that they were alone, Hopper pulled the Blazer to a stop and they got out. They walked silently across the grounds until Hopper found the spot they were looking for. Once more he felt a pang of guilt, realizing that he had not been back to his friend's grave since the funeral.

Jane knelt by the bronze marker, bearing the name Benny Hammond. Setting the box beside the headstone, she carefully removed the lid and gently lifted one of the two roses within. Laying it across the stone, she turned and looked, uncertainly, at Hopper.

"What do I say?"

"Whatever is in your heart," he smiled back. "There's no wrong thing to say."

She thought for a moment and then began. "Thank you. Thank you for the burger. It was best I ever had. Thank you for trying to help me. I'm so sorry they hurt you."

Hopper knelt down beside her, placing a steadying arm on her shoulder. She laid her head on his shoulder as a few tears slipped silently down her cheeks and onto his jacket.

Picking up the other rose, Hopper laid it next to Jane's and whispered a thanks of his own. "Thank you Benny. Thank you for taking care of my little girl when she was lost. I'm so sorry."

A single tear betrayed his gruff exterior and rolled slowly down his cheek. It dropped to his shoulder and came to rest beside one of Jane's.